

ELIJAH TURNING HEARTS¹

By Paul Penno, Jr.

June 14, 2014

Painful childhood abuse that is buried and suppressed in the past is never forgotten and often ends up being your present and future. Kids who were neglected in childhood grew up with a lack of food at home, dirty clothes, unpaid bills that resulted in no utilities, dirty apartments or houses, no health care treatment, absent parents who provided little guidance or rules are among such neglectful acts.

Kids who were physically beaten were often blamed for their parent's inability to control their frustration and anger. These kids were told that they were bad, evil, or disobedient. During childhood if you lived in fear of your parents because of regular beatings you experienced abuse.

Sometimes kids were not overtly abused with physical or sexual abuse but were instead the victims of emotional abuse. This can include verbal emotional outbursts, yelling, cursing abuse by a parent, playing psychological games, humiliation, anger outbursts, and other types of manipulative behavior by a parent.

King David wrote something about this kind of parental abandonment: "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up" (Ps. 27:10). The Lord Jesus says to each one of us personally, "I have loved you with an everlasting

love: therefore with loving kindness I have drawn you" (Jer. 31:3). That is personal, individual, intimate love; not a cold electronic thing. It's the love of a Father—our heavenly Father. As intimate, close, personal as any earthly father's love can be. Only far more so.

Some dear people feel that they have never known an earthly father's love; what can the dear Lord do for them? I knew a boy in college like that—he was having a bitter time. But truthfully, none of us have ever had a human father who could perfectly portray the love of our heavenly Father, for us.

So, let no one be the least discouraged if you have never known an earthly father's love: kneel on your knees and make a choice to BELIEVE what you cannot SEE. He will respond to that prayer!

The dear heavenly Father will not forsake you or neglect your prayer; He has already loved you with "an everlasting love," now ask Him to grant you the spiritual eyesight, the discernment, to recognize the gift He has already given you. If His love is "everlasting," that means that He loved you while you were still in your mother's womb. He was working on you even then, with that love. If you can't sleep tonight (or any night), pray The Lord's Prayer.

"My Father, which art in heaven . . ." No angel in heaven is permitted to address the great King of the universe, Master of the Milky Way, as "Father." Every angel must stand aside and let you pass on your way to the throne of the Father. That is astounding, but solemnly true.

¹ Matthew 11:27. 100, 101.

It's because of the Father's love for this one "little lost sheep," this one planet in rebellion; the Father has given His only Son, Jesus, to be the new Head of this human race; in so doing He has adopted as members of His own family every one whose heart cries out, "Father!"

In a legal, judicial sense, the Father has already adopted every one of the human family; but some either have refused to be adopted or have not known they have been adopted; these await the coming of the "news," which of course is "good news," which the Bible calls "the gospel."

"Ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, "Abba, Father. The Spirit . . . beareth witness with our [personal] spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:15-17). When you can't sleep, think about that.

The Father has the Milky Way and all the universe around His neck (as it were), but He is infinite; that means He can care for you and about you just the same as if you were the only "child" He has in this vast universe.

That is taught by Hebrews 11:6 where we are told that anyone who is sincere in wanting to come to God must believe two things: (a) that God *is*—this infinite King of the universe; and (b) that He listens to, and rewards anyone who is sincere in coming to Him (including sinners!).

So, when you can't sleep, pray to this infinite Father who sees and cares when a little sparrow falls to the forest floor (Matt. 10:29). Pray to Him . . . don't stop, pray . . . If you don't know what to say,

pray, "Abba, Father . . ." until the realization comes over through the Holy Spirit that you are somebody important whom "the Father of spirits" cares about personally (Heb. 12:9).

This will be the "reconciliation" that the Father is working to do: "God was [is] in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19).

When you are reconciled to the Father, then you are also reconciled to His Holy Law. That will include all the works of righteousness including keeping holy the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week.

God loves the immature believers in Christ as He loves the mature ones. He has a message for children.

Children have a problem from birth, as do we all. We all have inherited a sinful nature and our carnal heart by its very nature "is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). Thus we are not to be surprised that even little children *naturally* have a mind that is in opposition to their parents.

Their relationship to their parents is in miniature a replica of their natural hostile relationship to God which they will consciously understand as they grow up. As little children they need the reconciling ministry of the gospel of the grace of God. It is manifested through the love of the parents, whose message the child "receives" long before he can understand the gospel in words.

Assuming that a child's physical needs are being well met, if it is a sweet and lovable child, that probably means it is already "receiving the

reconciliation” (see Rom. 5:11). The conflict between the love of self and righteousness has begun already, though in infantile dimensions; the ministry of parental love is already “reconciling” in its nature.

The goodness of the child is not innate goodness—no one has any; in ways suited to the child it is already the gift of salvation “in Christ.” Blessed is the parent who understands what is going on; the message of Ephesians is already bearing fruit!

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother,’ which is the first commandment with promise: ‘that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth’” (Eph. 6:1-3).²

Let’s face the honest truth: some parents are very difficult for any child to “honor.” Often even the more upright parents are so rigidly legalistic in their supposed righteousness that they are a roadblock to the child’s harmonious spiritual development. Still, there is the divine commandment to “obey your parents”: it must be obeyed. But how?

Thank God, the Giver Himself of the commandment became a Child, and as such He was “in all points tempted like as we are, yet without [the] sin” of dishonoring *His* parents (cf. Heb. 4:15). But here’s a shocking question: as a Child, was Jesus tempted to dishonor His parents? Didn’t He have as His mother the most wonderful woman in the world? (One great church says Mary was

² Paul took this not from the familiar “Ten Commandments” of Exodus 20 but from Deuteronomy 5:16.

“immaculately conceived” in the womb of her mother—which the Bible does not teach.)

Mary confessed her need of a Savior, just as we all must confess our need of One (Luke 1:46, 47). She loved her Child Jesus, no question about that; but often a mother can love her child but at the same time be tempted to be exasperated at him/her (and in our experience be more than tempted!). We have a glimpse of Mary’s temptability that way in the story of her encounter with her Son in the Temple when He was only 12 (2:43-50).

On the way home from Passover, she frankly forgot about Him during a day’s travel. Meanwhile, He was staying behind to witness to the nation’s leaders, *the right thing for Him to do*.

Her exasperation with Him is evident in her words, “Son, why have You done this to us?” You can feel the thunder and lightning in her words, “Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously.”

He responded to her honestly, confronting her with the truth, but He did not sin by dishonoring her. She knew well who His true Father was: He said, “Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?” Yes, children, know that Jesus was *tempted* then to dishonor Joseph and Mary! Yes, He was “in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” Now, you join Mary in confessing that you need that same Savior to save you from yourself, and to give you grace to honor your parents, no matter how ornery they may seem to be.

Children, only by the grace of that Savior can you obey this commandment to “honor your father and

your mother,” because no one in the world has perfect parents. Your sinful nature you inherited from our father Adam tempts you to disobey this commandment. But through the faith of Jesus *you can* and you *will* be victorious over temptation!

Jesus makes His promise to children: “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, even as I overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Rev. 3:20). Yes, there will be children sitting on that “throne”!

Ephesians 6:4 “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.”

Fathers are busy men, harried by constant pressures for the care of the family. They must provide for the physical needs of the children whom they have brought into the world; but impatience can prompt them to expect too much of the children and “provoke” them into childish sin.

But it’s still sin; and in the books of heaven is it not written against the father’s name? Father needs that same Savior; and he has Him for his Savior already! Now it’s time to remember. Let Him thank the Savior more earnestly and heartily for His grace. There is precedent in the Bible for fathers taking the sin of their children upon themselves in a corporate sense, illustrating the God-given sense of responsibility that rests upon fathers (see Job 1:5).

In these last days especially, the Lord will give special help to needy fathers because of His promise to send us “Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord” (Mal. 4:5).

We are Seventh-day Adventists, people living in the “time of the end,” in the time of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary, in the great Day of Atonement. If time in this sinful world were to go on another 3000 years, these words would still be “wise.” But we must look at them in the light of the “third angel’s message in verity,” to borrow Ellen White’s description of the message that “the Lord in His great mercy sent” to us in the 1888 era.

The word “atonement” means reconciliation, at-one-with. Those who await the coming of the Lord on this Day of Atonement want to be reconciled with all the members of their families. This calls for some tremendous miracles! No one of us is innately more righteous than others, so the problems of family disorientation and alienation are in reality our “corporate” problems as a church. It seems awkward to pray to the Lord for “at-one-ment” with Him if bitter alienation with family members haunts our prayers.

And let us speak with compassion; those who fortunately have been spared the bitterness of separation or divorce should thank the dear Lord, and sympathize with those who have not been so fortunate. Marital discord is an extremely heavy burden to carry! When we all “appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Cor. 5:10), if we are married, we shall be standing there with our spouse. Does the Lord Jesus have some special help for us during this Day of Atonement, to prepare for that tense moment?

Yes, there is, in God’s promise to “send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the

Lord” (Mal. 4:5). If your mental image of “Elijah” is that of a specialist in chopping off heads of priests of Baal, look again. When “he” comes he will specialize in ministries of reconciliation: “He shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers” (vs. 6). Such a work could not be successful unless there is also a turning of the hearts of husbands to their wives, and wives to their husbands.

This cannot be a fear work, even though the concluding clause says, “lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.” It gives the superficial impression of the greatest fear-driven movement in history; but it cannot be because fear never works the kind of “reconciliation” that is the subject of the great Day of Atonement. It’s “hearts” that are “turned,” and only love can do that kind of “turning.” And the only love that can work that stupendous miracle (which is greater than creation) is the love of Christ.

We conclude therefore that the coming of “Elijah” means the ministry of the experience of self being “crucified with Christ,” which in turn must mean the greatest uplifting of “Christ and Him crucified” that has ever been known on earth—and that of course will be the message of that fourth angel of Revelation 18:1-4. Love, not fearful terror, will bring the “third angel’s message” home to wounded hearts.

“And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers” (Mal. 4:6). Some may call this a psychological ministry, but it is a miracle of divine

grace that is desperately needed now. Reconciliation of alienated hearts will be the burden of his message and the subject of his success in ministry and of his identification. That’s his primary task, not administering lethal judgment.

Elijah’s mission will be the greatest love-and-reconciliation-building ministry ever performed on earth since Pentecost. Satan can perform physical miracles (he is a very qualified orthopedic or cardiac surgeon), but reconciling alienated human hearts is a greater miracle (a five by-pass in the operating theater may not bring husband and wife together again. Only “Elijah” can do that one; but that’s what he has come to accomplish, and if we condemn him like Jezebel and Ahab did and stubbornly disregard the fire that falls at “Elijah’s” prayer, then must come the “Brook Kidron, 1 Kings 18:40).

Elijah was very patient for 3-1/2 years; then came Carmel and the end of patience forever. God is infinite, but His patience is not. Let the one who trembles find comfort in Psalm 130. What makes one really “fear” is the awareness of His forgiveness!

A literal appearance of the translated Elijah may not be the necessary fulfillment of the promise because Jesus said that the coming of John the Baptist fulfilled it in His day. In fact, it was not the personal presence of the Baptist that was the fulfillment; it was his message (Matt. 11:7-14).

Elijah was a frail mortal man “subject to like passions as we are” (James 5:17), and the Baptist, also. But both men identified themselves with God

so closely that they stepped into the emergencies of their day and took action as though the cause of God depended on them individually. The way the Bible introduces Elijah on the stage is strange: he just suddenly appears in the office of king Ahab without the normal fanfare of introduction for a prophet, nothing that says “the Lord spoke to Elijah. . . .” Elijah appears as one who came out of Gilead moved by his own deep convictions. He did not seek to become the Lord’s messenger, but he responded to what was for him an overwhelming motivation of truth. We could say, “the love (agape) of Christ constrained him” (cf. 2 Cor. 5:14), that is, love for Israel and love for the honor of the God of Israel. In this respect, Elijah is a true forerunner of those who will await the coming of Christ—they are so concerned before the world and before the universe for His glory that they would rather sacrifice their own personal salvation than be disloyal to Him.

Thus there will be thousands of individuals in all lands and cultures who will be little “Elijahs” manifesting the faith-inspired courage of this one man, reproducing in their little environment or culture a fresh display of the power of the true gospel—all together enlightening the earth with the call, “Babylon the great is fallen. . . . Come out of her, My people” (Rev. 18:1-4). “Elijah” may be here already, or very near!

Satan is becoming more astute with his propaganda campaign of besmirching the character of God. He has targeted Jesus’ favorite word “father” which He used to reveal the divine family.

It’s true that some fathers deserve the licking they are getting for having abandoned their wives and children to fend for themselves. This leaves lasting scars for life.

Further, the Catholic Church has appropriated the term “father” for their celibate clergy. There are not a few priests who have abused their positions of power behind the altar or in the convent.

Then the feminist movement has done enough men-bashing to de-construct the patriarchal society. It has come to the point where even within the church prayers are heard to the “Mother” God. Mothers are viewed as the nurturing, loving ones. Fathers are thought of as distant, un-emotional, and unapproachable.

Sometimes we humans have had earthly fathers who left us confused and bewildered at the word “father.” But Jesus came on a mission to this earth specifically to reveal to us the family of the Godhead. “All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and He to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him” (Matt. 11:27). Here is marvelous instruction in self-denial, which is the highest wisdom. Everything is delivered into the hands of Christ, and He uses the power only to reveal the Father to men, while He Himself remains unknown. We speak of knowing Christ, but in knowing Him we learn only the character of God. In seeing Him, we see God. Jesus said to Philip, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9).

He “emptied Himself” that the Father might appear. In all the universe no one knows the Son, except the Father. That was and is the sacrifice of Christ. Looking down upon fallen humanity, His heart was filled with love and pity, and He said to the Father, “I will declare Thy name unto My brethren” (Heb. 2:12). So He was content to be despised and unknown, to be misunderstood and rejected, without any complaint, knowing that the Father understood Him.

When God the Father was confronted with a world [that is, in Adam] that had sinned and rebelled against Him; did He drop a bomb on them? No; He did what the unfallen universe thought was unthinkable: He frankly forgave them and granted the sinners a judicial verdict of acquittal.

Now the Father was free to treat sinners as though they had never sinned. The name for this action is GRACE.

Romans 5 describes what happened: “God’s act of grace is out of all proportion to Adam’s wrongdoing. For if the wrongdoing of that one man brought death upon so many, its effect is vastly exceeded by the grace of God and the GIFT that came to so many by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ” (vs. 15, NEB).

This marvelous gift of grace does not belittle the seriousness of the sin that we have committed; the true dimension of the guilt of our sin is the murder of the Son of God.

What kind of sacrifice can balance that account of our guilt? Someone holy and innocent must take our place and “pay the price of guilt.”

This is a legal or judicial “verdict of acquittal” that Christ accomplished for us and gave us as a GIFT. The Father so loved us that He gave us His only Son to die our second death. All He asks from us is to “believe” what He has done. And that word “believe” means to express a heart-felt appreciation for what it cost Him to save us. And that heart-appreciation melts the stony heart, and changes us—that is, converts us. The Bible invites us to “think of God.”

And when we do, it is not to think of Him as some merely infinite electronic-like intelligence that pervades the universe, but we are to think of Him as Someone infinitely close and personal—“Our Father which art in heaven. . .” (Matt. 6:9).